

MEDIA RESPONSE GUIDE FOR INDIANA IN-TIME GROUP

A critical element in Traffic Incident Management in Indiana is our cooperative partnership with the media. The greatest benefit that they can provide is to get information out to the public so traffic can be more efficiently detoured and safety issues can be addressed quickly. There are however, elements in the media's response that can be detrimental to the handling of an incident scene, preservation of evidence, and most importantly to the safety of the public, responders, and the media themselves. To mitigate the risks, there are certain measures that the media should take, in cooperation with the Incident Command, at any incident. The guidance provided below is designed to assist the media in planning, responding, and working with the emergency response community. Sometimes, not responding directly to a scene is the best response for the safety of all involved in an incident. The ultimate goal is safety at the scene and the safety of responders, media, and the public. Clearing and cleaning up a scene to prevent residual incidents is always more important than covering the scene. Open lines of communication are crucial to efficiently meeting the needs of each entity involved in a scene.

Responding to the scene:

- 1) If potential danger exists, you should avoid responding to the scene of an incident. In return for cooperation of media to **not** respond to a scene, accurate and timely information shall be provided to you by the Incident Command or their designee.
 - a. Public safety agencies agree to do their best to provide media with photographs and/or video footage from the scene to document the events in a timely manner. Representatives of the responding public safety agencies agree to interviews after the incident is cleared in an alternate location or to complete interviews by telephone.
 - b. Media is also encouraged to utilize live feeds from public safety cameras, when available, that are made public rather than respond to scenes to record footage.
- 2) If you do decide to respond to the scene, you should park off of the highway system for safety reasons. For example, if there is an overpass in a safe area that views the incident, this would be preferable to being directly next to an incident scene. Media credentials should be ready for display at all times.
- 3) If there is no safe area off the highway system; you should park well ahead of the incident in the same direction of travel as the incident. **Do not** park on the opposite side of traffic and walk across as this creates a hazard for you, emergency responders, and the public. Do not create another incident trying to cover the first incident.
- 4) Attempt to contact Public Information designees prior to arriving at any scene to determine the best area for parking, coverage, and safety issues.

Once at the scene:

- 1) Park as far off the roadway as possible and turn off lighting that could distract motorists and/or emergency responders.

- 2) Immediately put on a reflective vest as required by FHWA (23 CFR Part 634). If possible, the vest should have the word "MEDIA" on it in large letters. Other identifiers should also be available including media credentials. Utilize any other traffic safety devices required by your policy.
- 3) Follow any directions from emergency responders. If you are requested to leave, leave the scene and follow the below procedures for input/inquiry/escalation. There may be a hazard you are not aware of that is causing them to direct you away from the scene.
- 4) If not informed differently, prior to taking any other action, you should approach the Incident Commander / Unified Command. This may be a Trooper/ Police Officer / Deputy Sheriff / Emergency Services Manager / Fire Chief or a multiagency group depending on the size and scope of the incident. The Incident Commander or his/her designee will provide you with safety information, location of where you can take video, and any limitations. They should also provide you with incident information as appropriate, in keeping with their Agency guidelines, and without impacting operational effectiveness. This may entail you going to another location for a formal briefing.
- 5) Clear the scene with the other responders. Once the scene is finished, do not stay at the scene for any additional time. This creates a hazardous situation for you and for the motoring public as well as negatively impacting the flow of traffic.
- 6) If questions remain or are unanswered, ask for contact information of a Public Information unit who can be contacted for updates and more detailed information.

Input /Inquiry/Escalation:

- 1) Your input is critical to more effectively handling scenes. As much is practical, you will be invited to After Action Critiques to work on better techniques of handling scenes, safety concerns, and the flow of information from incident. These are used as non-judgmental evaluations in a safe post-incident environment to maximize honest discussion. There may be points where you are asked to leave due to law enforcement sensitive or other similar types of information or discussions.
- 2) You have every right to inquire about an incident or why you may be asked to leave an area or take other action. At times, it will be impossible or unsafe for an incident commander to provide you with this information you requested at the scene. You should also understand that there may be a delay in getting you an answer depending on the nature of the incident and time of day. You should contact the following entities for more information:
 - a. The local headquarters of the agency handling the incident (i.e. Post Headquarters for state police, county jail for local sheriff's agency, local civil service headquarters)
 - b. PIO of the agency handling the incident
- 3) At times during stressful situations, you may be given an instruction you disagree with or that you feel is unsuitable. In this case you should still follow the directive and then contact the local chain of command of the agency involved. This will get the situation resolved at the appropriate level. You may lose some time at the one particular scene, but it will ensure that future encounters go much more smoothly and this scene will remain safe.